

1 **Declaration of Debra Israel**

2 I, Debra Israel, hereby declare:

3 1. I make this declaration based on my own personal knowledge and if called to
4 testify I could and would do so competently as follows:

5 2. I teach fourth grade at Garfield Elementary School in Oakland, where I have been
6 teaching since the spring of 1997. I am fully credentialed to teach in California public schools,
7 and I have my CLAD credential to teach students who are learning the English language.

8 3. I make this declaration to describe the difficult conditions under which I teach at
9 Garfield and to explain how important it is for children to have healthy learning environments.
10 When I first started teaching at Garfield in 1997, the environment was just hell on the staff and
11 students working there. Some of the conditions at the school have improved because we have
12 fought so hard to make changes, but still, in spite of all our efforts, we're badly overcrowded, we
13 don't have the textbooks we need, and some serious facilities and environmental concerns remain
14 at the school.

15 4. It is clear to me and to the children that the schools in the poorer neighborhoods
16 are not as good as the schools in the hills and the richer neighborhoods. My fifth-grade son
17 recently asked me how come kids in rich neighborhoods have better schools, and I had to tell him
18 it's because people don't care. I'm ashamed to have to give that answer, and I believe that all
19 children deserve the same basic learning conditions.

20 The Conditions at Garfield Now:

21 5. One of my main concerns about Garfield is its severe overcrowding. We have
22 way over the number of students that the school was built to accommodate—until a couple
23 hundred kids are taken away from the school, we're going to continue to have serious problems
24 at the school from the overcrowding. The overcrowding affects my students' academic
25 achievement because there is no way we teachers can effectively collaborate to help the kids
26 we're most concerned about. Teaching at a huge school necessarily means that I and all the other
27 teachers have less ability to work on our students' academic achievement. We cannot really
28 follow through with the students who need help because we have too many kids at the school.

1 For example, because we're such a big school, a lot of kids don't get tested even during their first
2 year at the school so they go for a whole year and more without essential resources they're
3 entitled to if they have special needs. In addition, having so many students who need our time
4 and attention means that we do not have time to sit with other teachers to talk about our
5 classroom and teaching concerns. If we taught at a smaller school, then we could reach the kids
6 much better.

7 6. The school overcrowding also creates a basic safety issue for the kids. The school
8 nurse told me at the beginning of this school year that we do not have enough supervision on the
9 yard for all the kids who are out there at the same time. I worry about the danger to the kids from
10 being out there with inadequate supervision.

11 7. Textbooks are also a big concern at Garfield. We do not have enough books for
12 all our students, and even when we're supposed to have books because the district puts book
13 orders in, we generally do not get the books on time for the entire school year. The problem is
14 that the book ordering system is so bureaucratic that it takes a while to get books actually in a
15 classroom. For example, I did not have a complete set of the Hampton Brown Into English
16 books for my English Language Learner kids at the beginning of this school year. I know none
17 of the other fourth grade teachers had a complete set of the Hampton Brown books either because
18 I'm the fourth grade team leader and it's my job to check on the other teachers to find out what
19 they need. I'm assertive and I told the Principal at the beginning of the year that we needed the
20 Hampton Brown books. It took a couple of months before I got the set of books for my class, but
21 then none of the other fourth grade teachers got their sets. Because I'm the only fourth grade
22 teacher who has complete set of the Hampton Brown books, we have to share them among all the
23 fourth grade classes for the English Language Learners. For another example, we finally got
24 social studies textbooks for this school year in approximately January, after the school year had
25 begun in September. Until January, we had never had social studies textbooks during the four
26 and a half years I've taught at Garfield; my understanding is that the district had not adopted a
27 social studies text until just before this school year began. We also do not have an adopted
28 science text in the district; I believe the district is in the process of adopting a science text this

1 year.

2 8. We have a rat and mice infestation at Garfield. About a month ago, I told the
3 Vice Principal that several kids told me they had seen rats and mice on the yard. I watched the
4 Vice Principal type in a work request to have an exterminator come to campus to deal with the
5 problem. Later, the Vice Principal told me the work request was denied and she showed me the
6 notice saying the request was denied. She told me she would follow up to find out why the
7 request was denied, and I have not heard back from her yet about why we could not have an
8 exterminator come to campus. Obviously, the Vice Principal is very responsive, but we don't
9 always get what we need from the district. I know the parents are very concerned about the
10 problem because they comment on it to me during parent meetings. The parents and students and
11 teachers need to know that we are getting regular spraying to alleviate the problem.

12 9. The main building has not had air conditioning ever since I've been teaching at
13 Garfield. We're incredibly hot in our classrooms during the spring, summer, and fall. Until this
14 year, we operated the school on a year-round multitrack schedule so we were in the classrooms
15 without air conditioning all summer long, which was unbearable. Now our school calendar is
16 almost in line with a traditional school calendar, but we're in school until the end of June. The
17 months of June and September are hot in Oakland, and October also can get quite hot.
18 Temperatures routinely reach 80 degrees and above, and one side of the main building at Garfield
19 gets about ten degrees hotter than the other side. The heat is disastrous for learning. I can't teach
20 in the extreme heat—we're all soaking wet from sweat and we're uncomfortable and terribly hot.
21 I feel sick, dizzy, weak, and nauseous because I'm too hot, and the kids complain to me about the
22 same symptoms. The kids look so bad in the heat; they get really sick looks on their faces, and
23 they're like panting dogs inside. We turn the lights off in our classrooms on hot days, and we
24 turn fans on to blow the hot air around at least. But then we have to talk louder to be heard over
25 the fans, and the kids are already distracted from the heat. It's not healthy for anyone to be in a
26 heated room for hours like that. We've pushed really hard to get air conditioning at the school,
27 and we were told we were on a modernization plan to take place this summer. I just found out
28 that our school has been rescheduled, again, for modernization, and that the air

1 conditioning/heating system, among other things, will be put off. I'm really upset that we're not
2 going to get air conditioning this year because we so desperately need it.

3 10. I have serious concerns about the facilities at Garfield. In the main building, the
4 ceiling tiles are stained, which shows that we have a leaky roof. In addition, we have a built-in
5 wood cabinet in room 20 in the main building that smells of mildew, and the school will not
6 clean it. They have tested the cabinet and decided that there is no dangerous mold in it, but the
7 school won't clean out the cabinet to relieve the smell. The cabinet itself smells awful, and
8 anything in it smells awful as well. I used to teach in the room with the smelly cabinet last year,
9 during the 1999-2000 school year, and I used to clean the cabinet out every few months myself.
10 It's nauseating to clean it out because the smell is so intolerable, and I won't clean it out now
11 because I can't take it anymore. I used to buy mildew remover and spray it into the cabinet, and
12 that spraying would work for a few months before the smell came back. I'm sure the cabinet is
13 not good for kids to be around and in any event the cabinet is useless because of its awful smell.

14 11. I and most of the other newer teachers at Garfield came in through teacher training
15 programs that automatically credentialed us with the CLAD credential to teach English Language
16 Learners, which is important because Garfield has so many English Language Learner students.
17 Now we have a nice cadre of teachers who have CLADs at the school, but we were still learning
18 when we came in and while we were first teaching at the school. Part of the problem is that in
19 California teachers are allowed to be in a classroom while we're still learning. Under internship
20 training programs, we teachers have support because we're in training, but still we're dealing
21 with classroom management issues and language issues at the same time that we're teaching for
22 the first time. It's really hard to take in all those issues at once and to try to teach students. It's
23 even harder for emergency credentialed teachers because teachers on emergency credentials have
24 not had and are not undergoing training in how to teach; teachers on emergency credentialed
25 have only passed the CBEST and earned bachelors' degrees. Teachers really need to be in
26 internship programs at least.

27 The Conditions at Garfield in 1997, When I First Started Teaching at the School:

28 12. When I first started teaching at Garfield, in approximately April of 1997, I took

1 over a class that had had three or four substitute teachers before I came. Garfield operated on a
2 year-round multitrack schedule then, so the students and I had another three to four months of the
3 school year still to complete, and the students had not had a permanent teacher for quite some
4 time.

5 13. The classroom I taught in when I first came to Garfield in 1997 was one of the
6 classrooms in a wing at the school, and it was a pretty horrendous environment. The carpeting
7 was ripped up and filthy and it had duct tape on it that people would often trip over. The
8 classroom itself was dirty and dusty and the air vents were filthy. The stained and falling ceiling
9 tiles showed that we had a leaky roof. The classroom just was not healthy for us to be in; we
10 were all sniffing and sneezing while we were in there. Students and staff in classrooms on that
11 wing had health problems, including asthma. The kids seemed to have a lot of allergy related
12 symptoms, such as sinus infections, that were consistent with dust mites. It was just hell on all
13 the people working in there and we were worried about the kids.

14 14. In addition to these health-related problems in the wing classrooms when I first
15 started teaching at Garfield, the noise level in the classrooms made teaching and learning
16 extremely difficult. We had no permanent walls separating the classrooms then, and the noise
17 among all the classes made it chaotic for all of us.

18 15. The ceiling tiles and the roof over the wing classrooms have not yet been
19 replaced, but a lot of the other horrendous conditions in the wing classrooms have been
20 renovated now because so many people complained. We got measure C money to renovate the
21 school, so the old rugs were taken away, new linoleum was put down, the vents were cleaned,
22 and the heater and air conditioning system now works better in the wing than in the rest of the
23 building. In addition, the school built permanent walls to separate the wing classrooms, but the
24 school didn't put any doors on the classrooms. Still, even without the doors, the classroom noise
25 level is reduced and it's not as chaotic as it used to be in there.

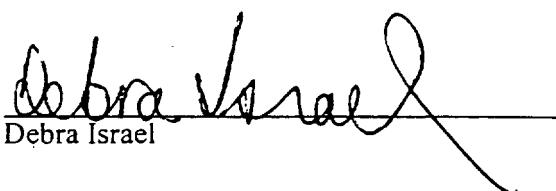
26 //

27 //

28 //

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

I swear under penalty of perjury of the laws of the State of California and the United States that the foregoing is true and correct. Executed by me this 6 day of May, 2001 in Oakland, California.


Debra Israel